

## As Talks on Soviet Troops in Cuba Drag, Chances for Solution, and for SALT, Dim

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WASHINGTON — As U.S.-Soviet talks over Russian troops in Cuba drag into their second week, chances of a politically acceptable solution dim and the threat to the arms limitation treaty grows.

The longer the negotiations continue, the harder it will be for Moscow to make concessions without losing face. Similarly, prolonged talks will make it more difficult for President Carter to persuade the Senate—and the country—that an ambiguous outcome isn't a victory for the Kremlin.

An ambiguous outcome currently seems most likely. Administration officials don't expect the Soviets to remove the brigade. Nor do they expect Moscow to force the U.S. to live with the status quo, something the President has said is "unacceptable."

What is being said in the talks between Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin is a well-kept secret. But it's clear the Soviets are bargaining hard. Carter administration officials, who last week spoke optimistically of resolving this latest U.S.-Soviet dispute soon, don't any longer. "It may take some time," says one official.

Time doesn't appear to be on Mr. Carter's side. With his leadership in doubt, he can ill afford simply to let this dispute drag on. Nor can he expect it to slip quietly into diplomatic oblivion as the future of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty has become firmly linked to a resolution of the Soviet troop issue.

Already, the momentum for SALT that existed after the initial hearings this summer is gone. Last week, Sen. Russell Long (D., La.) seized the Soviet presence in Cuba as a reason to announce that he will vote against the treaty. Sen. Sam Nunn (D., Ga.), widely considered the most influential Senator on SALT, has seized upon new delays in the SALT vote to renew his demands that the President outline a five-year defense-spending program before the vote,

currently expected around Thanksgiving. That defense program, Sen. Nunn says, is critical to secure his vote for SALT.

Even if Mr. Carter secures some face-saving resolution from the Russians, he is likely to find it hard to restore momentum to the SALT debate. Any outcome short of the removal of the troops will be seen by many in the Senate as phony. So, Mr. Carter will be in the uncomfortable position of defending a fuzzy solution as a real and acceptable one.

Administration officials still talk of a solution that somehow removes the combat characteristics of the Soviet brigade. That could be done in a variety of ways, these officials note. So far, Moscow insists that the brigade is there only to train Cubans.

If the President can't win an agreement he believes he can sell politically, he can, of course, always abandon the talks and take unilateral steps to alter the situation. For instance, he could beef up U.S. forces at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, or he could make a show of military force in some other region such as the Indian Ocean.

Such a move would be out of character for Mr. Carter, but it is one option under consideration. The President's advisers acknowledge Moscow may be unwilling to give enough to permit a solution Mr. Carter can defend as a real change. With SALT already in jeopardy and Sen. Edward Kennedy (D., Mass.) testing the starting blocks, they know Mr. Carter can't afford to appear to be caving in to the Soviets.